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THE SETTING

361 Three miles to the north on the Hyderabad–Karimnagar road
312 there is another village, about as large as Shamirpet. It is called
578 Aliyabad. It has some rich and influential Muslim and Hindu agriculturists among its residents who share with those of Shamirpet the waters of the Shamirpet tank for irrigation purposes. This system is not very satisfactory and the two villages have numerous complaints against each other. There is a keen rivalry between the two, and every two or three years the tension and passions of the people rise to such an extent that there is danger of a breach of peace and of rioting. The residents of Shamirpet do not think much of the people of Aliyabad, and the latter heartily reciprocate their dislike.

671 People living in different villages have very few occasions on which to meet each other as a whole. There are no common ceremonies and functions in which several villages participate. To a certain extent caste ceremonies provide opportunities for inter-village meetings; but the most common meeting-places for people belonging to the nearby villages of the same area are the markets and fairs.

564 communities. Persons belonging to several different castes are [621] united by some common values and obligations in this unit. But caste as a unit of social organization cuts across the narrow boundaries of the village and extends to a fairly wide geographical region. The *varna* system or the fivefold division of Hindu society is an all-India phenomenon, but in the different geographical and linguistic regions these *varnas* are divided into numerous castes (*jati*) which are practically distinct from and independent of comparable castes in other areas. Thus in South India, in the Tamil, Malayalam and Telugu-speaking regions respectively, there are separate groups of Brahmins who constitute independent castes. There are numerous restrictions on inter-dining, and intermarriage between them is not permitted. All these groups will be designated by the generic term Brahmin; but in actual practice they are each a separate caste characterized by endogamy and [101] distinctive local traditions. It has been pointed out earlier that culturally Shamirpet lies in the area of Telangana, which is a 582 part of the larger culture-area of Andhra-desa. Most of the castes in the village confine their social intercourse to Telangana itself, a 564 few extending it to other parts of Andhra-desa. The Muslims, being 621 converts to an alien religion, are not obliged to observe this rule and can freely inter-marry with Muslim immigrants from other parts; but among them also marriage between people already having some blood ties is preferred. For Hindu castes it may be said that in actual practice a number of neighbouring villages constitute for them a quasi-independent local group within the wider regional community. In analysing one hundred and twenty family case-histories, it was found that out of three hundred and eighty marriages over 68% were confined to a group of villages (and the cities of Hyderabad and Secundrabad) within a radius of approximately thirty-five miles from Shamirpet; 30% to other villages within sixty miles of the village; and only 2% in still more distant villages or towns. In no case was a marital union entered into with a non-Telugu caste, even with a similar caste name and social status in another linguistic or geographical [571] area. Thus the horizontal ties of caste extend to the whole culture area, but active social relationships are generally confined to a cluster of neighbouring villages.

623 Two types of inter-village organizations deserve to be noted. They are councils of the different castes and inter-village councils.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Living Together

1. INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS

The people of Shamirpet, like the other peasants of Andhra, exercise considerable reserve in their initial dealings with outsiders. The first impression that one gets regarding their attitude is one of extreme constriction, suspiciousness and guarded behaviour. When this initial reserve is broken down, they reveal themselves in a totally different light—as emotional, communicative, and at times even boisterous. Nearly all of them have great curiosity, and are easily attracted by anything that is even slightly uncommon or unusual. Opinions are freely expressed, and all public gatherings—big or small—are rather noisy. Middle-aged and elderly people generally have a grim expression, and it is considered a mark of respectability in women if they walk with their eyes downcast. But unobtrusiveness is not regarded as a virtue, and the people freely make comments and counter-comments on all subjects with which they may or may not have any concern. There is a great tradition for argument, which can easily drift into becoming a noisy quarrel or altercation. Tempers rise easily, and abuse may be showered volubly by both sides; but differences are patched up as easily, and it is not uncommon to see two people walking together as great friends although on the previous day they may have quarrelled bitterly on some trifling issue. In their inter-personal relations the people are hypercritical and very sensitive. This leads to a perpetual attitude of fault finding. As the people do not easily let go an opportunity of commenting on and criticizing their neighbours, their relations are never very smooth and certain. However, on occasions which demand a display of good-neighbourliness and generosity people

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571 come forward very readily to help those who need it. It is common
157 to suspect others' motives; and not unusual to be always on the alert to read hidden meanings into the seemingly innocent utterances of others. Analysis of their life-histories shows that the people are not given to introspection. They are always on the defensive; but their inter-personal relations are not characterized by detachment. In their thoughts, likes and dislikes they are quite open, and all persons having even casual contacts have a fair acquaintance with one anothers' ideas and attitudes

827 It is not uncommon for people to analyse and describe the
[186] personality-traits of other inhabitants of the village as well as of
577 outsiders coming into the settlement. Positive qualities, having obvious approval, find expression in such epithets as: 'good person', 'hard-working', 'honest', 'respectable', 'well-behaved', 'intelligent', 'generous' or 'large-hearted' and 'faithful'. Epithets describing negative traits which do not meet with social approval are many and varied, and among others include: 'bad person', 'lazy', 'dishonest', 'shameless', 'mannerless', 'foolish', 'miserly', 'small-hearted', 'unfaithful', 'good-for-nothing', 'liar', 'all talk but
[521] no deeds', 'ill-tempered', etc. Analysis of such traits is firmly established in the culture-pattern, and occupies an important place in the conversation of the people when they meet in small groups.
[183] Although conformity to social norms is idealized and emphasized, when there is a breach of traditional ways the person responsible likes to confess it in confidence to someone else. Long conversations and the mutual sharing of secrets are quite frequent. However, when friendships break up the sanctity of earlier secrets is not protected by any code of honour. Within limits originality and innovation are admired; but excess and ostentation soon lead to social censure and ridicule.

827 Subjects coming under the critical eye of society are: (i)
626 breaches of traditional norms, (ii) display and exhibitionism, (iii)
577 sexuality, (iv) efforts to rise in the power hierarchy, (v) conspicuous success, and (vi) originality and 'too many new ideas'. Carrying tales and 'whispering about the doings in others' houses' go on in the community on a wide scale. It is criticized by the aggrieved persons and their sympathizers, but no one regards it as inherently bad. 'Incidents' or breaches of established norms are discussed in small conversational groups at first, and the more important ones among them gradually filter through and reach the respon-

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unmistakable appreciation. Cowardice and treachery are condemned, but people still indulge in malicious gossip and back-biting. Mutual suspicion characterizes the general nature of inter-personal relations. Two families on the road to prosperity are likely to be jealous of each other; but adversity almost never fails to bring them nearer and closer. Exercising little control over their emotions, people get excited very quickly; anger and friendship are both aroused in them with equal ease.

A study of inter-group relations will give us a better idea of the nature and quality of the attitudes that largely govern inter-personal relations in the community. For this we shall first examine the inter-caste attitudes embodied in stereotypes, and later analyse similar attitudes and opinions covering two sets of rival groups—educated and uneducated, and those with urban contacts and those without them.

INTER-CASTE ATTITUDES: SOME STEREOTYPES

Inter-caste attitudes find expression in several stereotypes which are a part of the thought patterns of the people, and find expression both in jest and banter as well as in quarrels and outbursts of anger. Among others, the following stereotypes and related anecdotes were noted in Shamirpet.

The Brahmin is 'pious from outside, but not so at heart'. He is 'tricky and calculating'. 'He instigates people, but always keeps himself in the background.'

The Komti is 'a born coward, but a shrewd business man'. 'When he says anything on oath, take it that he is telling a deliberate falsehood.' 'He spares no ingenuity to save even a counterfeit coin.' 'Gods do not penalize a Komti for telling lies, he is born to do that.' The anecdotes concerning the miserliness of the Komtis are indeed many and varied. 'If a fly falls in butter-milk, rich people will throw the butter-milk away, the poor will throw away the fly and drink the butter-milk. But the Komti squeezes out the butter-milk before throwing the fly away.' 'If a relation comes to the house of a Komti and the time of the evening meal approaches, he will think, "If this guest goes home, I shall be able to save one meal." The guest on the other hand thinks, "If I stay here a little while more, one meal will be saved at home." And a battle of wits goes on to save just one meal.' The stories of their

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truth and untruth. He is sweet when he wants us to do something for him; and coarse when the work is over.' 'The ways of city people are strange. They will go to bed even with their cousins and aunts.' 'The villager who has lived in the city for some years learns all the ways of the townspeople. He may be an insignificant menial in the city, but when he returns to the village he behaves like a big lord.'

The people with urban contacts, on the other hand, regard the village-folk as rustic and crude; and consider themselves more forward and civilized. They have an unmistakable tendency to look down upon 'these simple and uncomprehending people', make fun of their ways and occasionally exploit them by exerting undue pressure. 'These people are timid and foolish. They are afraid of anyone who can make some show of authority, and yield very easily to the pressure of officials', said a village youth when he was asked to give his opinion about his fellow villagers, who had not had the benefit of contacts with city ways.

Those who have some urban contacts are gradually coming to the fore in village leadership. They are often criticized and commented upon, but nevertheless their opinions are valued and in general the community looks to them for guidance in all situations 'where it has to face the outside world'.

2. CHILDHOOD, YOUTH AND OLD AGE

This section is devoted to a brief study of the three most significant stages of life—childhood, youth and old age. While family, kin-group and caste are important units of social structure which influence the course of an individual's life-cycle, from the point of view of socialization and social control the significance of the village as a unit cannot be minimized. Apart from the family and the caste, people spend most of their time in their respective age-groups, and through this process of growing-up together, common play and participation in youth activity the people tend to have a common value—orientation and certain common basic attitudes towards life.

For the first two or three months of a child's life the mother remains almost in sole charge of it. A young mother is invariably instructed in the technique of mothercraft by an elderly female relative, but at this stage it is her responsibility to look after the

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stay at home. The middle-aged people have in effect the controlling hand in village affairs; the truly aged retire into insignificance and fade away. Some people cannot become reconciled to such retirement, having enjoyed authority and influence during their active days. They find adjustment difficult, and a life of dependence rather trying. But most people accept their position with good grace, leave active management of the home and family occupations to their sons and consequently find that their adjustment is much less difficult and inconvenient.

3. CO-OPERATION AND CONFLICT

Within the village community there is an appreciable degree of inter-caste and inter-family co-operation. Earlier it has been pointed out that the social system enjoins co-operation between a number of castes in the fields of economics and ritual. Several aspects of community life depend for their smooth running on this traditional system of mutual give and take. Apart from these conventional ties which are a constituent part of the social structure, several relationships involving voluntary co-operation can be observed. The simplest type of such voluntary co-operation found between neighbours or between friendly families is the system of 'accommodating' each other in time of need. Borrowing little sums of money or small quantities of grain, cooking for a friend during her menstrual impurity or confinement, and looking after children during the short absence of the mother may be cited as examples of this type of co-operation. House building and annual roof repairs also call for the help of friendly neighbours among the peasants of average and poor economic status. Careful mental note is made of all such favours received, so that they may be returned at the appropriate time. Refusing help and returning favours inadequately are looked upon as gestures of unfriendliness or as marks of 'a small heart'. Emergency aid is rushed to friend and foe alike. In cases of serious illness, fire or other accidents it is necessary to help a fellow villager; and in all such cases aid is rarely refused. Socio-religious ceremonies, particularly marriage, and those connected with death, are also important occasions that demand co-operation and help from neighbours and fellow villagers. The burden of the household in which the ceremony is to be performed is considerably lightened because of the help

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476 given by friends and neighbours. The average and poor peasants
571 extend this co-operation to the sphere of economic activities also, particularly during weeding and harvesting their families help each other in the speedy completion of the work. Among the occupational castes, families of a specific caste-group are expected to accommodate each other during time of illness, difficulty or temporary incapacity, by lending manual or monetary assistance to them for continuing their vocational craft. Fairs and ceremonies organized by the village reveal the co-operative spirit in the community. On some such occasions, one faction or other may refuse co-operation—sometimes it may even cause obstructions and create difficulties, but on the whole it can be said that organizers have the enthusiastic support of the bulk of the community and dissidents tend to lose the sympathy of wavering camp followers. In inter-village quarrels as well as on all such occasions that demand vindicating the honour of the village, the residents of the settlement often act with spirited unison. Behind most forms of voluntary co-operation there are no social sanctions; but the general attitude of society regards them as desirable and necessary. In the words of an informant, 'Who can say that he will not require help from anyone at any time? Money can buy many things. Power too can get many things done. But there are several situations in which neither money nor power helps. When you require sympathy and help your neighbours come forward.' To quote another informant, 'To-day you are well; to-morrow you may be very seriously ill and it may not be possible for you to get a doctor. What saves your life? A cheap herbal concoction suggested by your neighbour! One can never know how and when one is going to need the help of another.' Finally to quote a third informant, 'To-day I need your help; to-morrow you may want it from me. Why do we live in a village? Why do we not live in the wilderness? Only because we cannot do without human sympathy and occasional help.' Rendering help at the time of need is of value in itself. It partially relieves the distress of the person receiving help; and gives a psychological satisfaction to the person giving it, who incidentally also gains some social prestige through it.

578 But I do not want this picture of co-operation to be too idyllic, for conflicts and tensions in the community are also numerous. The analysis of the quality of inter-personal relations in the community,